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THE
BUCCANEER
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THE BUCCANEER BOOK

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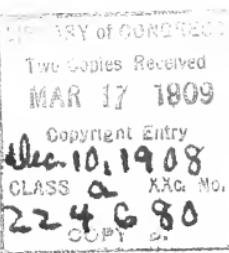
Songs of the Black Flag
By Alden Noble



GREEN MOUNTAIN PRESS

1908

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Dedication

To T. W. S.

*Ten years ago you found an idle prow
And sent her forth to seek enchanted seas;
Under your wharf she comes to anchor now,
Bearing to you, old friend, her argosies.*

Proem

*The graves are yours that have no name,
Yours were the keels that left no trace,
Save in smoke and sorrow and shame,—
What have ye now to face?*

*Yours were the times when blood was red,
Yours were the years when life was cheap;
All is over: you are dead:
Gentlemen, soundly sleep!*

*Soundly sleep with steel at your side,
Dagger and cutlass, stained to the hilt,
Lying so still—Death for your bride—
In your splendid courage and guilt.*

*You have fought the fight, you have paid the vow,
Sleep an ye can, then, under the years;
We drain one beaker unto you now:
I give you: The Buccaneers!*

“Who hath not cried ‘Thalassa’ in his soul?”

The Wastrel

I AM the son of *Bor* the Buccaneer,
Who frightened the first petrel to her lair,—
I bend my bows where danger drives most near,
My grave shall be where dying is most fair.

(*O ye who prowl by sea-wind, hear ye this!*)

Down the white way that marks the peril-line
I hear the mad white mermaids, drunk o' the deep,
Those snarling, singing voices of the brine,
From throats that yawn for eyes that never sleep.

(*O fickle mermaids of the barren kiss!*)

I am the soul that flouts the overseas,
That curbs the wrenching billow-bits of Time,
My prow first pierced the strange Hesperides,
And that first keel of mine,—how deep in slime!

(*O ye who slew by sunrise, mark ye now:*)

Mine are the lips which Death's grey lips have kissed
Deeply and often round his loving-cup;
I see his beckoning eyrie draped in mist
In every cloud that midnight conjures up.

(*Yet, mark ye, Fear hath never stained my brow.*)

I follow still the road that knows no dust,
I plague the wind-ways with unwearied sail,
And in my veins the flickering Wanderlust
Flames till the panting blood is stilled and pale:

(*But ye who know me, know I may not die!*)

Nay, till the One Wave roll again, as rolled
That first imperious ocean, I must drive
The dark, swart stallions of the Uncontrolled
Home to their stablign, conquered but alive.

(*O ye who drove them longest, let me by!*)

Drinking Song

THE sea swings mad in the raging grip
Of the seething, stinging gale,
It moans its hate with a yearning wrath
That bids fair cheeks go pale,—
But fill the bowl to its brimming tip,—
Drink! for tonight we sail.

Ay, fill the bowl and drain the bowl,
Sing hey for the brimming ale,
And fill and drain—again—again—
Till the smoking wassails fail,
Then hurl the bowl at the trembling host,
Drink! for tonight we sail.

The sleet beats down like a rain of blows
On a coat of iron mail,
And faint and thin through the ringing din
Is heard the lookout's hail,—
But it's up and up with the foaming cup,
Drink! for tonight we sail.

And it's hurl the cup at the landlord's head
And it's little his threats avail
For the unpaid score,—with joyous roar
It's jeer at the beckoning gaol,
And it's yell farewell through the night of hell,—
Drink, for tonight we sail!

“Sigh No More, Ladies”

THE stars are like thine eyes, my dear,
That sparkle o'er the glass
The night's less fair than thy bright hair
So let reproaches pass;
I will avow I love thee now
But sorry rogues are men,
And I have loved before, my dear,
And I shall love again.

The bubbles are thy laugh, my dear,
That flash up in the wine,
I like to think that thee I drink
In every draught of mine;
I like to hear thy laughter clear
So laugh to please me, then,—
But I have loved before, my dear,
And I shall love again.

The sailor-man is free, my dear,
And sailor-men abound,
While I, my dear, am a buccaneer,
So let the glass go round;
I carry my trade, be it ship or maid,
In spite of gods and men,—
As I have loved before, my dear,
So I shall love again.

Kiss me again for luck, my dear,
And I will kiss for love,
For I have seen nor maid nor quean
Thy beauty's not above;
I love, and yet, I shall forget
—And where is your beauty then?—
For I have loved before, my dear,
And I shall love again.

The End of the Fight

THE fight is fought, the foe is sunk,
The tale is told for the golden junk,
And the Skipper sleeps in his final bunk,—
 Ho! for Davy Jones!

We sighted her twenty below the Horn,
On a restless day in the wakeful morn,
Well for her had she ne'er been born,
 Born for Davy Jones.

Her crew was many and stout and brave,
No quarter wanted and none we gave,
And we left the sick for the shark to save,
 Save from Davy Jones.

We that were cool when the fight begun
Were red and grey by the nooning sun
Ere ever the stubborn goal was won,—
 Meat for Davy Jones.

With a score of gashes her captain died,
But he heaved the booty over the side
Into the Locker that beckoned wide,
 The Locker of Davy Jones.

The foe is sunk where the wave is blue,
And Davy laughs as he gets his due,
Our Skipper and half his swarthy crew,—
 Ho for Davy Jones!

To a Merchant Sailor

Be yours the prudent sailing
From harbor up to town,
Your timid women wailing
Whenever rain comes down;
A mild and easy creeping
From market-place to mart,
A sound and dreamless sleeping,—
Sign of a moral heart!

Be yours the dreary climbing
Of hemp and mesh and mast,
And after proper priming
Up to a Mate at last;
Then years of grog-and-waters,
Of starb'rd, luff, and lee,
And seven sons and daughters
In a shanty by the sea.

And endless out-and-inning,
And ceaseless back-and-forth,
And toil that lacks the sinning
To make the toiling worth;
And never blood of human
To paint your tarry hand,—
And sorrow come o' woman
To meet you when you land.

Be yours the feeble fighting
That keeps the liver white,
Your turn-the-other smiting
That makes a mock of Fight;—
A truce to your cautious guarding
Of the bastions of the bay. . . .
I sail to a wild bombarding
Of the white walls of Cathay!

The Love o' Ships

O IT is ours to hear you, Love,
That laugh like a siren on a siren shore,
With the blue of your eyes like the blue above,
Your yellow hair as the yellow sands before;
You ride on the wind and call us, Sweet,
At the dawn, the purple dawn of the daring day,
And the catch of your breath lends the breakers feet
To help our hearts obey (*frail hearts!*),
To help our hearts obey.

'Tis ours to taste the kiss of your mouth
Like the faintest fume of the salt of the sunrise sea,
When the eyes of you flame as the sun of the south,
And your hair, your buoyant yellow hair is free;
'Tis ours to feel the sting of your breath
That quickens our hearts, as the waves are quicked
by the wind,—
To follow you, Love, till your jealous Death
Finds us and strikes us blind (*poor eyes!*)
Finds us and leaves us blind.

We in your worship battle and dare
And make of our lives a toy and a jape, content
To see the glint of the sun in your hair,
The ringing deep in your pagan spirit blent;
We follow and woo and are fain to wed
For you have all the wealth of the world to dower,—
Though our honour has died where faith lies dead
We barter them both for power, (*sad fools!*)
We fling them away for power.

And sure we see, when the foam is free,
And the hissing waves are hurtling over the rail,
Your form afloat on the film of the sea,
And we fare drunk on a dream of your forehead pale. . .
We yearn to the goal of your luring lips,
Forgetting the clasp and the human kiss of earth,—
And we die in the love of you, Love o' Ships,
Who have sought you from our birth (*mad souls!*)
Who have loved you from our birth.

Execution Dock

THE wind sings high around a corse
That hangs wi' a shriveled smock,
Its echoes die in the desolate sky
O'er Execution Dock.

The wind has many an eager hand
To harry the grisly Thing
That whirls and spins with fearful grins
That haunt remembering.

The wild storm-demons of the night
Hurl shuddering breaths of pain
To mingle drear in the winter air
With the clang of the choking chain.

The long lean posts rise high and black
To the cross-beam where It sways,
While down below, in the humble snow,
A woman kneels and prays.

The Plank

(A DOUBLE RONDEAU)

Whose turn next to take his stand
Where the plank reels black above the blue,—
To wrench in vain at the fettered hand?—
Ere the sea shall smother the last adieu?

'Mid the gibes and jeers of the conquering crew
At the devil's drift of the dread command
That ends the hopeless interview,—
Whose turn next to take his stand

On the oaken road to a farther land,
(Narrow and oaken, seen of few,
For the eye were steady indeed that scanned
Where the plank reels black above the blue)

To know the fear of the souls that slew,
The thrust in the back of the goading brand,
To feel on the forehead the fatal dew,
To wrench in vain at the fettered hand,

With head held high, but heart unmanned,
With cheek turned pale to the breeze that blew,—
For his bones shall lie on the dipsey sand
Ere the sea shall smother the last adieu?

Gods of the false, and gods of the true!
Grant that these fiends may understand
The things that on their plank we knew!—
That one may say to that cursed band:
Whose turn next?

The Buccaneer

(A SONG STORY)

"It is related of the notorious Pirate known as the Scourge of the Caribs, that he would never have to do with any woman, saving only one; and her he held only a single hour in his arms, yet ever in his heart. And their meeting happed of an early morn, during his sacking of her native Town of Harnadino, in the Year of Our Lord, sixteen hundred and forty-two."—Armilaud's Chronicle.

1. The Sailing

GREET ye the morning, laugh her up,
And sing the Sun below,
For it's out wi' me to the Carib Sea
Where the scented east-winds blow;
O the day is new and the galleons few
That cling to the desperate rendezvous
We know, we know;
So lay your lingering steel away
And seamen be for another day,
For another Sun and our goal is won,
Out on the Carib Sea!

For Harnadino harbor lies
But fifty leagues ahead,
So an' we speak no sail this week
We dine on Spanish bread;
So an' we grip no scented ship
There's a fairer goal to our golden trip
I' the bay, i' the bay;
So handle your hemp as ye polish your steel
Gold's in the offing, war's at the wheel,—
And you're out wi' me to the Carib Sea,
Out to the Carib Sea!

2. The Meeting

WE bearded the garrison first,
The citadel made we our own,
The stout-hearted governor cursed
Till he swallowed it all with a groan;
We hanged him high from the wall
And turned to the helpless town,
As drunk with the dread of it all
The night reeled shuddering down.

The rage of the ones to resist
Was drowned in the vermeil wave
Where the sea-steel sputtered and hissed
Where my bellowing sea-dogs drove;
Yea, driving the lambs to their fold,
So sacked we with never a light
Save that which the seekers for gold
Let flame in the murderous night.

I wandered alone in a way
Unplundered, silent, apart,
And saw when the dawning was grey
A Face look into my heart!
She stood, with the sorrowful eyes,
Where the dawn-ghost haunted the dial,
And I measured the idle sunrise
By the lovelier light of her smile.

3. The Wooing

Ah, Princess, hast thou laughed and left
Some faery isle that called thee queen?
And hath that island so bereft
Retained the flouted robe of green
That graced thy lovely ruling, when
It knows thou shalt not come again?

Princess, hearken: wilt thou trust
To my stern clay thy tenderer dust?
Turn to my wooing,—*hush thee, sweet,*
'Tis but my comrades in the street!

Ah, Princess, doth thine empire seem
Far from the anguish here that lies? . . .
Resume the sceptre of thy dream,
And make crown-jewels of thine eyes,
And rule a realm whose boundaries are
Limited by my boundless war!

Princess, hearken while I woo,
For love is brief, and death is due
To him who kills,—*flinch not, my fair,*
'Tis but my comrades on the stair!

Ah, Princess, of that faery isle
Resign thy reign, and rule with me
With sudden splendour of thy smile
O'er the long reaches of the sea;
And all the world shall vassal be,
Heart of my heart, for love of thee.

Princess, hark to me, and give
Thy love to make my love to live;
Here, to my heart! . . . *Love, fear no more,*
'Tis but my comrades at the door!

4. The Marriage

THE still cathedral, high and dark and wide,
The gloom that hid us kneeling side by side,—
Yea, where the candles at the chancel flared
I took of love a sweetheart and a bride.

(Chanted the priests: *Orate, Domine!*)

The sudden silence drinking up the din,
The hush that gripped us as the doors swung in
Leaving us soul to soul with solitude,—
The while the city wallowed in my sin.

(The dreamy chanting. . . *Jesu. . . Domine.*)

The long slow Latin periods were hung
Too lovingly upon the abbe's tongue,
I made a prodding handle of my sword,—
And all the while the dark-robed brothers sung:
(Ora pro nobis. . . Jesu. . . Domine.)

I snatched the grey hood from his frowning brows,
Word for his word I vowed the immortal vows,
And kneeling knew an unknown sacrament
In the loud silence of her Father's House.

(And for my soul the chanting. . . *Domine!*)

5. In the Sunrise

SWEET, in the sunrise you and I,
Clasping the love we may not read,
Hear in the rout that eddies by
Unwonted voices strained and high,—
Love we, the while they bleed.
Now in the dawn their voices seem
Broken and sad with pain and fret,—
But we are lovers in a dream
Wherfrom we may not waken yet.

Sweetheart, see: the night is gone,
Love is rising,—Love the Dawn!

Yea, for the chill years you and I
Snatch from the world a gilded cup
And in our fingers hold on high
The magic ichor of Live-or-Die,—
Laugh we to drink it up!
Mark how the war-notes wild and weird
Fall on the faint wind of the south,
And all our war hath disappeared,—
Sweet, I am thirsty for thy mouth!

Sweetheart, see where flames the Day,
Love the Dawn illumes our way.

Here it is Dawn, but bye-and-bye
When Evening draws his sable cloak,
Shall Love be lost? Alone shall I
Pursue the quest where barren lie
My conquests low in smoke?
Never an answer try to speak
For Time it is must answer this;
Lean but thy cheek against my cheek,
Turn but thy kiss to meet my kiss!
Sweetheart, see: their fire dies,
Quenched in the Love-Dawn in thine eyes!

6. The Parting

IN the deep guard of the garden, with its arms around
her thrown,

There I laid her with the roses for her winding-sheet
alone,

And the silent heart within her made no quiver of
her breast,

Though the flood that stole her from me left its crimson
on her vest.

Yea, I laid her there alone, when our love was just begun,
And I stared in still amazement to behold the tear-
less Sun.

Then they tried to come between us, and I slew them
when they tried,

For I wanted one more silence with my sweetheart and
my bride;

So the world swept on around us while the rose-leaves
gathered deep

On the fragrant tomb that held her fast, and lulled my
love to sleep.

Then I raised my hands on high, to the barren morning sky,
And I cursed with every oath I knew, the One who let
her die.

Yea, my days should reek with crimson! . . . On the
sudden, round her head,

Glimmered something that is given to a maiden who
is dead,

And I stilled my oaths in wonder and my heart stood
hushed to see

How a maiden in her dying consecrated Love for me!
Then I left her there alone, with the roses for her throne,
And I gathered Love within me for the roses he had
blown,—

And in the silent sunrise, Beauty gathered in her own.

Dig Deep

DIG deep, and tumble in the bones!
Dig in the sand whence the tide has fled,
Turn them over, the creaking dead,
Silent the skull and still the groans,—
Dig deep and tumble in the bones.

Man was he once, and the sea-bar moans
A dirge for the death of a soul of steel,
A soul that skippered a saucy keel,
A keel that weathered the hurrying zones,—
Dig deep and tumble in the bones.

Kings were twain on their tossing thrones,
Flaunted a flag skull-barred and black,
Woe to the merchant that crossed their track!
But one must die while one atones,—
Dig deep and tumble in the bones!

A guerdon of gold the deep disowns,
A sea-cave robbed of its glittering hoard,
Leaping dinghys to bring aboard
What the ocean gives not, merely loans,—
Dig deep and tumble in the bones.

A landing at night where the ebb-tide drones,
A thrust, a curse, a yell of pain,—
Bleaching corpse in wind and rain,
One man snatched from Davy Jones,—
Dig deep and tumble in the bones!

Long Live the King

LONG live the King! . . . The King is dead,
He who had sworn to rule for aye
Where now I swear to reign instead
O'er hearts that hate and hands that slay
Hearts that hate as hot as they. . . .
Hark to my blooded sea-dogs sing:
(For fallen lord small care have they)
“The King is dead: Long live the King!”

Beneath his keel the waves were red
From tropic tide to Baltic bay;
Voices of vengeance on his head
In dying gasp from lips of grey
Livened the languor of his way;
If those dead souls do know this thing,
Chuckle they not to hear men say:
“The King is dead: Long live the King?”

The fame he wooed my name shall wed,
A world shall bend beneath my sway,
For every crimson drop he shed
Full flood will I, from out this day
When first in battle-stained array
I heard my blooded sea-dogs sing,
Standing above him where he lay:
“The King is dead: Long live the King!”

L'ENVOI

Dead foe, the world is mine today!
Yet Time to me this hour must bring
When I, as you, shall hear them say:
“*The King is dead: long live the King!*”

The Exiles

SPREAD your sail to the wincing weather,
Steer ye out from the port of Youth,
Where Life and Love shall be left together
Hand in glove with the hand of Truth;
Scoff ye loud at the hope that thrills ye
Deep in the gloom of a midnight sea,
And laugh, laugh up at the fiend that kills ye,
But never look down at the doom to be.

Slither your steel in the swift passado,
Bury her deep in the bosom bared;
Brag ye out in your bold bravado
At them who dare not the things ye dared;
Harry your foes where the tempest blinds ye,
Follow at midnight and follow at morn,
And take brave heed that the darkness finds ye
Harboring fear in your hearts, unborn!

Pester the long lean unknown reaches—
Hull far steeped in the setting sun—
Sully the calm of the moonlit beaches
With the blatant boom of your godless gun;
Drape your couch with the flags that flout ye,
Bury your dead in their ships of pride,
And bid the Devil go on without ye! . . .
Never again will he quit your side!

Miserere

OUR God in Heaven! Were it not for Thee,
We could go down to die as to a feast
Spread on the grey floor of mine host, the Sea,—
We could die out contented then, at least,
A smile on ev'n our never-smiling lips,
Dreaming of songs and splendours on sunk ships,—
But by Thy Majesty, ah, what are we?

Our God in Heaven! Is there such a one,
Or is that promise but the trick of Death
To cheat us of the glory we have won,
To rob of triumph this our parting breath,—
And does the end come with the heart's last beat
And does the sea take everything, complete?—
No man doth know of this, for no man saith.

But Thou, who knowst how mutable is life,
Wouldst thou condemn to everlasting fire
Us who so oft have felt the thrill of strife
Smother with ashes fall'n from passion's pyre
The saving spark of pity's faint appeal?—
Dost Thou not know the shame that we must feel,
Enslaved by him that was our slave, Desire?

We are so tired! . . . surely Thou dost know
(Granting that Thou *art* God, for argument)
How weary are the windings and how slow
The steps whereby our final course is bent,
How widely chill the days, how bleak the gloom?
Surely there is no need for other doom?—
Ah, Fate's avenging hand should be content.

If Thou art God, on utter mercy throned
Above the splendour of the star-hung sky,
Waste not Thy pity on the half-condoned
Whose weakling sins have never reached on high;
But lay Thy hand on each sin-whitened head
And grant to us of Peace abandonéd
Not Hell, but only slumber, when we die.

Revenge

Is Hatred such a restless thing
That all my sleep is broke?
By night I seem to hear the ring
Of steel behind the smoke,
At dawn the chilling fog-bays wreathes
His image in the west,
Ah, *Mary!* if I could but sheathe
My dagger in his breast.

His name I hear in every shout,
In every wind that sighs,
I see his doubles walk about
Wearing his bloodshot eyes;
I grip my blade ten times a day
Seeing strange men who bear
In guiltless eyes the guilty grey
His green eyes used to wear.

I would not send a bit of lead,
Nor hang him on a rope;
For I must *feel* that he is dead,
O I must see him grope
With twitching hands upon the brink
While his life-blood doth start!
I'd give my soul to sink . . . sink
This dagger in his heart.

The Stern Chase

A STERN chase is a long chase
And the wind dies every hour,
And the veil that covers the ocean's face
Is Death and Wealth and Power.

Ten leagues behind, we cursed the wind
That would not blow by day,
Three nights we tried to trail her blind
And thrice she crept away;
O the fog blew thin and the breeze drew in
And the leagues lay green and gone,
By our keel that quivered we vowed to win
Ere the birth of the dismal dawn.

The wind's awake, the rollers break,
Split by the scurrying prow,
We gulp our haste for the booty's sake
And reef the tops'l's now;
For haste is dear, but the goal is near
And she hath not seen nor heard;
Our lights are lost, but our steel is here,
Our ears are sick for the word.

Our eyes are bright for the chance of night,
We strain across the gap
That yawns 'twixt us and the tossing light
That rocks in the rollers' lap.
The span half-sped, we loose the head
In the teeth of the ocean's frown,—
When the waves recoiled from the things we said,
For the stubborn fog dropped down!

The fog that shifts, the fog that drifts
Sank lazily onto the sea,
And we snatched one glimpse thro' the final rifts
And steered from memory. . .
Like a wraith of snows her sheets arose,—
“’d-a-port!” her lookout cried;
And our steel leapt forth for its meal of blows,
As our chains caressed her side!

*A stern chase is a long chase
And the wind dies every hour,
And the veil that covers the ocean’s face
Is Death and Wealth and Power.*

The Minstrel of the Fleet

*It was the minstrel of the fleet
That lured the notes from the willing strings,
He holds the heart of you there at his feet
By the call of heart when the minstrel sings.*

Years unsped and the world was young
And the haws were green in an English glen;
We kissed by night and the songs we sung
My love and I ne’er sang again.

I kissed my love on her red red lips,
And my love she wept as her heart would break;
And I left my love for the Love-o’-Ships
And my love believed for our True-Love’s sake.

I sailed the heart of the year away,
And I sailed the seal of another twain,
And I loved my love for every day
When shone the Sun or rained the rain.

Years were three and I harked me back
To the hawthorn glen in the golden morn,
I heard the beagle upon my track
And I cursed the soul where the sin was born.

Your love is gone (in scorn they said),
She would not wait for a buccaneer;—
My love was true for my love was dead,
Her grave is green as my soul is sere.

Years be-sped and the world is old
And the dew is fresh on the English green,
And my love's at rest in the English mould
Here in my heart that ye now have seen.

*Hard eyes are soft for the song is sweet,
Hard hearts are soft for the song he sings,
It was the minstrel of the fleet
That woke dead Youth from the wailing strings.*

The Ballad of the Forty-Year

ONE, men saw for an honest man
And one they saw for a buccaneer,
But no man knew when the hunt began,
Lost in the haze of the Forty-Year.

Friends were they ere the Forty-Year,
Boys together and merry twain;
Youth was on them and Youth was dear
Till Love came by to molest his reign.

One was gay, and he stole the maid,
In the dark of the moon he bore her far,
And the grave one followed them down the glade
And tracked them close by star and star.

He caught them by the yellow sea-shore,
To light the rivals the dawn did rise,
And the grave man's love the gay one bore,
And love for her captor lighted her eyes.

They fought with knives and the captor bled
So he called on her who was loved of each,
And she sheathed the blow that would stretch him dead,
And slain she lay on the pallid beach.

The victor gazed for deep and long,
Kneeling beside them, his love and friend;
And the vanquished swore to right the wrong
Ten hells for one, at the other end.

And the victor saw the lovelight glow
Deep in her eyes, a wondrous flame,
And the word her dying lips crooned low
Was heard of him for his rival's name.

The victor looked on her dead, dear face
And hied him off at the dawn of day;—
But the vanquished kissed her lips for grace,
And side by her side he swooned away.

•
The victor hied him where brave men be
And turned his trick at the wheel of trade;
Many the merchant he steered to sea,—
Free wi' his liquor and free wi' a maid.

He sailed the seas from Pole to Pole,
An honest captain, as all men knew,
But he drowned in sin his hidden soul
To cheat his Master out of His due.

But the vanquished set him upon his trail
And tracked him over the world and gone,
And year by year he fared to fail,
Yet tracked and hoped by dawn and dawn.

The vanquished got him a pirate keel
And wreaked his hate on the merchant-kin
Of the one who fled from his sleepless steel,—
And shuddered the earth at his open sin.

He whipt the seas in a blind black ship
That wrought its woes 'twixt tide and tide,—
For the Forty-Year he touched no lip
Save only that of his dying bride.

The deep is cruel, and danger naught,
And life is lightly of tempest held;
The Forty-Year their manhood bought,
By the axe of Time was their vigor felled.

And syne the tracker's heart is woe,
And the Forty-Year but mocks his ire,—
Yet zone by zone his lean sails go
Till the gilded east meets the western fire.

And the Forty-Year befogged his brain
Fettered his hand and clogged his feet,
And he saw the Past as a wraith of rain. . . .
And they met by noon on the open street.

Now knew they both what man was there,
And cared they not what Hand had led,
And the tracker lifted his eyes in prayer,
And the tracked man found his voice and said:

“Now here is my breast and here the knife,
But hear my word, my last in life,
And there above is Heaven’s dome,
And then ye may hurry the hot blade home.

“Now the Forty-Year is sped and past
And glad am I to behold your face,
To flee no more from fear at last,
To hug the dagger that ends the race.

“For I have died a thousandfold,
Stabbed have I been by a million blades,
'Tis worse than death to see the gold
That crowns the heads of living maids,



“To see and know that mine I slew,
So that nevermore might she greet the day,—
In all my life hath no man been true,
For the scourge I bear drives Truth away.

“Friends have I sought by like or lure,
And begged their hands in fellowship,
And felt their stabs, than steel more sure,
The scorn that curls the sneering lip;

“So never a friend have I known to love,
And never a love have I known to keep,
Now grip this life I am weary of,
And stab me down to a dreamless sleep !”

The tracker thought of the crimson path
For the Forty-Year his feet had trod,
And he saw the wreck that was left of wrath,
Purged by the flame of the Wrath of God.

“Take up your life and go your way,
No judge am I to fill your bier,
Wait ye the call of Judgment Day !”
This is the tale of the Forty-Year.

Marooned

In all the earth

There is no thing except the sand, and me.
An endless bleaching yellowness lies here
Subject to silence and the silent Sun.
The sand has no beginning, neither end;
Around the isle have I sought end for it
And have found none, and when the wind is high
Even my footprints have been blown away
That marked one circuit ere I made the next.
Sometimes I curse the sea, but all the time
I know that she is guiltless, and I know
That she is kinder than the soulless sand,
For in the end she shall be good to me,
Embrace me tired within her mother-arms
And so shall give me peace. Yet still I curse
Her, for her luring brought me unto this:
Had she not called me those long summer nights
With soft seductive cadence and sweet words
I should not now be waiting here for death.

Life is a ceaseless hunt for turtle's eggs.
(O humorous employment!) Day on day
I rise up in the crimson morn and see
The red irrevocable Sun rise too
Out of the eastern wave. All day I watch
Him slowly travel his unyielding path,
Hating him all the while, yet hating more
The sullen gloom of twilight that his fall
Forces the world to wear. . . All through the day
I search the stolid sand for what may be
Of life that lies where turtles lay before;
For if today I have enough, tomorrow
Demands relentless meed, and thus I live,
Loathing the living, yet afraid to die.

How often have I tried to end it all!
So often have I failed. I, who was known
Wide as a living terror of red death,
Whom countless victims of my sword have cursed
Dying,—I am afraid to kill myself.
I have lain down and bade goodbye to earth,
Glared at the jeering sea and mocking sand,
Taken my dagger by its jade-green hilt,
Looked on the edge that was to drink my blood,
Loosened the shirt upon my breast, and there
Fumbled with grey unfeeling finger-tips
To find the proper rib, have placed the point
Sharp on the spot, have closed my eyes and laid
My left arm down beside me, clutched the dagger,—
And felt the end with thrice ten thousand pangs.

Yet always at the first fierce prick of death
Trembling I snatch the blue unwilling blade
Off from my breast and fling it far away
Hoping that I may lose it, and not know
Such torture more. . . And after wide-eyed night,
I have crept back at the first streak of dawn
And sought about the drifted, smitten sand
To find the blade that is my only friend,
And kissed it when I found it. . . Suicides
Men brand as cowards; they are more brave than I.
For death would be so quiet. I should hear
Not even the surges beat upon the reef.
I am so far from all the living world
I know the natural vultures come not here;
So would my body lie unpicked and still
Until the Sun had bleached it all away.

Time has unfolded to me many things. . .
I am more wise than when I came: I know
That it is folly to upbraid the Sun

For he can take no harm of it; 'tis folly
To rush each morning to the barren cliff
O'erlooking all the ocean, and to scan
The bare horizon for a sail,—because
There is no sail on this side of the earth.
'Tis mad to hope—and surely Hope is dead?
I have killed hope so many aching days,
By myriad hopeless nights has she been slain,
Till I have learned that she is really dead. . .
And yet, and yet,—she has a terrible ghost!
I have learned too that it is very mad
To rail at Fate, or at the sea or sand,
To curse the coming in or going out
Of days like, each to each. It is in vain
That I do keep my dagger sharp and bright
For I shall never sheathe it in his breast.

I dread the stubborn days' relentless round,
The dazzling sunlight on the waves that dance
To mock my soul that shall not dance again;
The days are twice as long as may be borne,
Yet must be borne. Sometimes I even laugh
To see how small a thing a man's life is.
The nights are loneliest. The buoyant stars
May rove across the heavens. I must lie
Flat on my back and watch them; I alone
Must live in one small corner of the world.
There is a tavern in a place I knew,
Kept by a shrew, a veritable hag,—
I cannot even wander in her door,—
How sweet to me her railing now would sound.
I fear the nights. . . for then comes Memory.
I am more brave when I forget to think.

. . . O Love, your eyes shine for me in the night.
I taste the perfume of your last caress,
The last, long, throbbing kissing of your mouth.
Your "I love thee" is magic in my ear
To mingle with the surf upon the shore.

I have lived the life of every man in mine.
I have been sullen as a convict is,
I have been sad as any maid in love,
I have outgibed the mad loud mirth of fools,
I have been happy as a little child,
Have grown religious, touched philosophy,
Have in a breath blasphemed and laughed and wept.
Yet all moods pass. The sea is just the same,
And I am grown old looking on its face.
I know that every wave that laps the strand
Is like to every other wave that comes,
As many follow this one, as the last.

I say my prayers to him, because I know
Somehow that wheresoever he may be
He is awake and hears me. It is sweet
To call around his head the flames of hell,—
It is my only pleasure. And he hears
Across the gulf of time, and in his turn
Curses my hate that will not let him sleep.

The Sun is falling low. Upon the earth
There is no thing except the sand, and me.

Explicit

DYING, you tell me, dying?
The day drifts fast to night;
The craft by the headland lying
Lean to the headland light;
I hear the stout sea-cables sighing,—
And I die tonight. . . .

The ghost of a breeze is blowing,
Failing and falling faint,
There's none where I am going—
'Fore God, I'm bound there ain't;
None knew more surely than I'm knowing
I'm no sculptured saint.

I'd hoped to meet him fighting,
Be dead before I fell,—
Death should be more exciting
Than this dull dipsey swell;
I'd always thought to end it fighting,—
But maybe it's just as well.

Away with that dead grinning
Mimicking crucifix!
I'll see out my own sinning,
Last cards shall take last tricks;
No whining end to my beginning,
My creed and His won't mix.

Dying. . . . I know it: dying.
The sun is sunk from sight;
The stars alone are trying
To send me down some light;
The dead day-wind in the dark is sighing
It is night. . . .

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